SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED PH.D THESIS ON

ECOLOGY AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SANTAL

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1. Objectives of the Study

The present thesis titled **"Ecology and Tribal Communities: A Philosophical Analysis with Special Reference to Santal''** is an attempt to understand the notions of environment of the tribal communities, especially the Santals. The primary purpose of the thesis is to trace the problems of tribal communities and their sense of ecology in their daily life. The thesis also studies the uniqueness of tribal understanding of their ecology. In view of this the thesis locates the following issues to be studied by the researcher:

- To understand the nature, material world and ecology were understood by various philosophers of the West as well as of Indian context.
- Tribal understanding of nature and non-tribal understanding of nature.
- To analyse the impact of displacement due to the modern notion of development on the ecology of tribal communities, especially Santals, as a philosophical issue.
- To study the effect of displacement on social, cultural and economic life of Santals.
- To study the dynamics of exploitation of natural resources with the help of philosophical tools and theories.

2. The Context

Herein, an attempt has been made to portray the role of ecology in the tribal daily life of India and to highlight how the natural resources are exploited by the non-tribal people in the context of modern development and in the context of globalisation. Therefore, it is our duty not only to conserve the great cultural heritage of Indian tribes but also to conserve our rich biodiversity for our own sake.

3. The Theme

The present study aims to enter into a systematic and descriptive analysis of the tribal people especially the Santals and their ecological sense and understanding.

4. The Research Issues

Taking to the above mentioned theme of the thesis the researcher identifies the following research issues for the analysis**:**

- The nature of differences between the non-tribal philosophy of nature and that of the tribal philosophy of nature.
- The problem of alienation of tribals from their ecological settings and how such alienation impacts the life-world of the tribal communities, especially Santals.
- How to understand the problem of sustainable development as a philosophical issue, based on empirical realities.
- The idea of sacred and its relation to the understanding of nature and ecology in the tribal life-world, particularly the Santals' life-world.

5. The Scope of the Study

It is an attempt to analyse the displacement problems due to construction of different mega projects in the name of modern development and globalisation.

With the depletion of natural resources at the cost of future generations, it is high time that we need to find alternatives to minimize the impact of modern development which happens at the cost of eviction, exploitation of natural resources, destruction of biodiversity, marginalization of the weaker sections of our population, especially those who are in the weakest rung of the economic ladder.

6. Methodology

The overall methodological framework is critical, analytical and descriptive. The study is undertaken collecting information from the reports, records and other studies related to tribal. Besides this, many books, journals, magazines are to be consulted for the purpose.

7. Sources

The primary sources will be the oral documents, collected through field work among the Santals, and Santal literature about their perceptions and thoughts on nature and environment.

The books, articles and other works on ecology, tribal communities, and santals by authentic writers are treated as the secondary sources. A detailed bibliography is presented at the end of the thesis.

8. Content

The thesis will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will be **"Introduction"**. This chapter will discuss the objectives, research issues, scope, methodology and limitations of the study.

The primitive inhabitants of India are known as the Adivasis/Tribals. They are put under the category of Scheduled Tribes according to the Constitution of India. Their distinct culture and worldview emerged with the concerns of ecology. Empirical realization concretely asserts their intimate connectedness with the nature. The Santals are one of the tribals of India, belonging to the Proto-Astraloid having distinct way of living and cultural identity in the national scene. As they assemble their essential commodities from their immediate environment, in spite of the modern influences, their livelihood and survival are co-existent with nature; their economical life, foods and drinks, dwellings, festivals, ceremonies, culture, religious beliefs and rituals are intimately affiliated with the nature. Furthermore, as forest resources meets Santals' daily needs and subsistence, they cannot conceive of existing away from forest environment.

The second chapter is titled **"Concept of Nature".** Here in this chapter, the views and thoughts of some particular Western philosophers as well as Indian philosophers on nature have been taken into account for analysis and for better understanding. From the ancient Greek to the modern Western philosophy the philosophers have discussed about the concept of nature. Their views differed widely according to time as well as persons. According to Thales universe is fundamentally water in its nature. Anaximandar holds that 'boundless mass' as the fundamental stuff of which the world is constituted. Anaximenes regards 'air' as the primary stuff of the universe. For Heraclitus, reality is change, flux and Becoming. For

Heraclitus not water or air is the primordial stuff; process alone is reality and is best symbolized by fire.

In the Medieval times, St.Augustine and Anselm hold that God is the creator of Nature. The medieval scholastic philosophy tried to understand the nature and its beings, centering the concept of God; and so the nature got its secondary status.

Modern Western philosophers like Francis Bacon, Descartes, Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume believed that real knowledge can be attained by sober investigation of Nature. This helped the emergence of understanding that nature can be dominated and manipulated with scientific inquiry and rational knowledge. With the advent of scientific objectivity, the object of analysis was understood as something external to the human beings, and hence exploitation of nature was justified for human benefit.

On the other hand, tribal people considered nature as their mother God, because their understanding is based on their practical interaction with nature. As nature sustains their livelihood and survival, they have purely grasped the inseparable connection between nature and human beings as a whole of their lives. So, as an infant of nature, they treat tree, water, mountain etc as their God. What is remarkable is that during contemporary period, the non-tribal people understand the importance of nature, and they enter into the discursive practice of the environmental ethics. It attempts to bring out the qualitative distinction between tribal's aspects of nature and modern Western philosopher's perspectives as well as the perspectives of Indian philosophy on nature.

The third chapter is titled **"Ecology and Tribal Communities".** This chapter tries to discuss how the tribal people depend on their own environment for their survival.

Tribals are known for their way of living and distinctive culture, which provides them distinct identity in the national scene. Their life-world and culture is constructed to suit their neighboring environment. The different modes of cultural behavior emerge among the tribals according to their living in different eco-settings. In this way, various types of cultures have emerged in the Indian cultural scenario and their culture still persists with the concerns of ecology and ecology plays a very important role in the tribal economic life too. Their feasts, festivals and ceremonies are the consequences of their age-old understanding in connection

with the land, water and forest. In that way their philosophy of life cycle coincides with the agricultural wheel throughout the year based on the natural phenomena.

The fourth chapter is titled **"Ecology of Santals".** In this chapter, the researcher particularly concentrates on the santals depends on their own environment for their survival and livelihood.

The close adaptive relationship between the Santals and the environment has enabled them to survive while leading a relatively isolated life in a difficult environment. During the ancient times, the Santal people confide on forest based activities like hunting, food gathering and farming. Being the part of pre-eminent, they are deeply conversant with the nature and accumulate their necessities as blessings. But those pristine manners are vanishing fast with the changing circumstances. Due to these changes, they proceed with subsistence agriculture, in order to maintain their economic activities, influenced by primitive technology generating fairly sufficient quantity of grains.

The Santals have traditional ethnic knowledge of use of different plants as well as wild edible forest mushrooms and understanding of ecology. The traditional Santal knowledge in respect to the diversity, use, ecology, and superintendence of wild mushrooms is not only significant for biodiversity conservation but also enhances further research for the sake of general interests. In that way its existence would not reside incognito and negation; it would not also lead to the extinction of such traditional knowledge from the public episteme.

The fifth chapter is titled **"Crisis in the Context of Globalization and Development."** This chapter evaluates problems and challenges faced by the tribal people in the context of globalisation and in the context of modern development.

Environment is broadly divided into two kinds, natural environment and social environment. Due to gradual urbanisation and environmental degradation, the environment base, particularly the forest areas have collapsed. Due to the collapse of natural environment, the social environment gets also affected. Such decline has made access to basic amenities of life even more difficult for the poorer tribal people.

Development induced displacement is a global phenomenon. Due to displacement, Santals lose their arable land, habitation, living, income from non-wood forest products. A significant number of Santal people who are generally reliant upon the natural common

resources are displaced. It disrupts their social net-works, social support system, socio-cultural fabric, breaks up living patterns and social continuity, threaten their cultural identity, eco-system to which they have been long associated. That increases the risks of epidemics and health problems. Their ethos and way of life get dismantled and denigrated due to the modern development. Traditional political organization which plays an active role in the internal administration of the Santal societies loses its significance due to mass eviction. The displaced Santals are neither appropriately compensated nor the fruits of development reach to them.

In aggregate, developmental projects are handed down without any concern for the cultural, historical and ecological complexities prevailing in the tribal regions. Based upon anthropocentric premises of mutilation of nature, customary institutions and values, impositions of individualism, statist ideology and reductionist world view, the development practices have ruined the physical, cultural and cognitive survival of the large masses of the country, especially Santals. Developmental projects encompasses an entire gamut of territorial resources taken away by the state, powerful individuals, private enterprises and transnational corporations, as well as displacement from one's own culture, creativity, community, power and knowledge systems through involuntary superimposition of the values and institutions of the globally and nationally dominant societies.

The current rapid technological advancement and unrivalled economic and political strength of world capitalism, and the rising power of neo-colonialism have shaped favorable conditions for the evasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of the tribals, especially Santals. Thus, enforced eviction of tribals to make way for mammoth capital intensive developmental projects have become a distressingly routine and ever increasing phenomenon.

In the course of research, the developmental projects affecting the livelihood of Santals will be studied with the help of critical theories and the problems will be analysed using philosophical tools and theories.

The last chapter, titled, "**Conclusion"**, will analyze the details discussed in the previous chapters, in order to arrive at a formidable thesis.

9. Limitations

This work discusses the problems in understanding the nature and environment only from tribal view point. There are also many tribes in India; but this study discusses only about Santals. Also, there is a limitation in gathering the relevant materials from fieldwork due to the constraints of time and space.

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